

How Cities in Developing Countries View Climate Change

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I. Introduction

Urbanization in the Global South is advancing at an unprecedented pace, transforming cities into hubs of economic activity, innovation, and cultural exchange. By 2050, nearly 70% of the global population is projected to live in urban areas, with much of this growth concentrated in developing countries. Cities in developing countries are experiencing exponential population increases driven by rural-to-urban migration, natural population growth, and expanding economic opportunities. However, this rapid urbanization often outpaces infrastructure development and governance capacity, resulting in overcrowded housing, inadequate public services, and strained transportation systems.

Urban areas in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Coastal cities face rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events, such as cyclones and

storm surges, while inland cities struggle with heatwaves, droughts, and water scarcity. High population density, concentrated economic activities, and inadequate infrastructure amplify these risks. These vulnerabilities disproportionately affect the urban poor, who often lack access to housing, healthcare, and social safety nets.

The concurrent challenges of urbanization and climate change present both risks and opportunities for developing countries. Urban centers are both significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and hubs of vulnerability, with internal migration driven by rural climate-induced challenges further complicating sustainable urbanization. Despite the potential of urban areas to lead mitigation and adaptation measures, urban residents' perceptions in developing nations remain underrepresented in global research. A study by

Ro et al. (2024) bridges this gap by analyzing survey data from eight cities across Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, revealing cross-national and regional variations in climate awareness, perceived impacts, and evaluations of governmental and international responses.

Building on this foundation, this article examines the intersection of urbanization and climate change in developing countries. It focuses on how urban residents perceive the severity and impacts of climate change, the factors shaping these perceptions, and their views on climate policies and international cooperation. (See “Exploring Urban Perception on Climate Change in Developing Countries” (Ro et al., 2024) for details.)

II. Urban Perspectives on the Severity and Impact of Climate Change

Perceptions of climate change in urban areas of developing countries vary widely, reflecting the distinct challenges and experiences of these populations. While climate change is often framed as a global issue, its impacts are deeply personal for urban residents, shaping their concerns and responses.

Health is a primary concern, with urban populations keenly aware of increasing heat-related illnesses, waterborne diseases, and respiratory issues linked to pollution and extreme

weather events. Over 70% of surveyed individuals identified health risks as their top worry. Economic challenges are also prominent, as climate change disrupts employment and income, particularly in sectors like agriculture and small-scale enterprises.

Tackling climate change requires both policy interventions and individual engagement. Among the actions individuals are willing to take, adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle emerges as the most widely preferred approach across all regions, reflecting a strong inclination for personal, non-financial contributions. In contrast, financial measures, such as supporting higher taxes to fund climate initiatives, are met with considerably less enthusiasm. Political and organizational engagement, such as voting for climate-focused candidates or supporting climate-related organizations, falls in the middle, with regional variations highlighting differences in civic participation and economic capacity.

Despite these disparities, the overwhelming majority of respondents express readiness to take some form of climate action, reflecting a broad awareness of the issue's urgency. However, divergent views on financial responsibility and the assignment of blame for climate change underline the complexities of designing effective and equitable policies. Tailored strategies that respect regional contexts and address local priorities are essential to foster meaningful public participation. By aligning

international efforts with individual and regional capacities, a more inclusive and effective global response to climate change can be achieved.

III. Decoding Climate Change Perceptions in Urban Populations

Understanding what drives climate change perceptions is key to crafting effective and inclusive environmental policies, particularly in urban areas of developing countries. Urban residents' attitudes toward climate change are shaped by a diverse set of factors, from personal experiences to socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

Education, income, and rural ties emerge as critical predictors of climate awareness and concern. Higher levels of education and income correlate with greater understanding and acknowledgment of climate change, often linked to human activities like deforestation and industrial emissions. Rural family ties, particularly in agriculture or fisheries, also heighten awareness, likely due to firsthand exposure to climate impacts.

Personal experiences with extreme weather events also play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions. Exposure to droughts, floods, or sea level rise tends to amplify fears related to income loss, displacement, and health risks.

Among these, droughts emerge as a particularly significant factor, driving widespread concerns about economic stability and food insecurity. Sea level rise further heightens concerns about climate change. However, events like landslides and heatwaves, while impactful, may not always be directly linked to climate change in public perception due to gaps in awareness or framing.

Information access further shapes perceptions. Media exposure to climate-related content correlates with heightened awareness, but interpersonal discussions—family and community dialogues—have a stronger effect on personal concerns. These interactions create narratives that make the risks and urgency of climate change more relatable and tangible.

IV. Public Views on Climate Policies and International Collaboration

The effectiveness of climate action in developing countries depends not only on the policies themselves but also on how they are perceived by urban populations. Public views on governmental efforts and international cooperation reflect a mix of hope and skepticism, shaped by experiences and trust in institutions.

Urban residents often acknowledge governments' critical role in addressing climate change but express mixed feelings about their performance. Trust in government signifi-

cantly influences these perceptions. Transparent and accountable governance fosters positive views of climate policies, while perceptions of corruption or inefficiency fuel skepticism.

International collaboration, however, is generally viewed more positively. Many urban residents see global partnerships as essential for providing technical expertise, funding, and knowledge-sharing. Expectations for international support vary by region, with some areas prioritizing financial aid for climate-resilient infrastructure and others seeking technology transfer and capacity-building. Despite this optimism, concerns about unequal power dynamics in global negotiations persist, raising questions about whether international agreements adequately address developing countries' needs.

A balanced approach to climate governance is essential. Enhancing public trust through transparent and effective domestic policies, combined with equitable international cooperation, can foster broader public engagement. By addressing these intertwined perceptions,

governments can build a supportive urban populace, paving the way for effective and inclusive climate action.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing urban perceptions of climate change in developing countries requires a nuanced understanding of how urbanization, vulnerability, and public attitudes intersect. This article has highlighted the severity and localized impacts of climate change, the diverse factors shaping perceptions, and the complexities of public views on climate policies and international collaboration. These insights emphasize the need for tailored strategies that reflect local realities, socioeconomic capacities, and regional priorities.

By aligning domestic efforts with equitable global collaboration, policymakers can foster broader public engagement and build resilient urban communities. Bridging these gaps not only paves the way for effective climate governance but also ensures a sustainable and equitable urban future in the face of growing climate challenges. **KIEP**

Reference

Ro, Yoon Jae, Ina Choi, Munsu Kang, Soeun Kim, Seungho Lee, and Inhoi Heo. 2024. "Exploring Urban Perception on Climate Change in Developing Countries." KIEP.